

SAMUEL PURCHAS AND HIS "THEATRE OF POLITICALL FLYING INSECTS"

BY HARRY B. WEISS

NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

When Nell Gwynn, if rather uncertain accounts are accepted, was about five or six years old, or, to be more specific, in 1657 there appeared in London a book entitled, "A Theatre of Political Flying Insects," written by one Samuel Purchas. In order to fix the publication date more clearly, it is not out of place to mention that Cromwell was Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland at this time, that John Bunyan was being formally recognized as a preacher, that four years previous, or in 1653, Isaak Walton's "Compleat Angler" had been published, and that one year later, in 1658, John Milton commenced work on "Paradise Lost" and Dryden published "Heroic Stanzas to the Memory of Oliver Cromwell," his first poem of importance.

In this country, witchcraft was gaining headway; the orthodox colonies were denying admittance to Quakers, and misbelievers, burning their books and subjecting them to indignities, imprisonment and even death. Such were the times upon which Purchas launched his book.

The complete title is "A Theatre of Political Flying-Insects, wherein Especially the Nature, the Worth, the Work, the Wonder, and the Manner of Right-ordering of the Bee, Is Discovered and Described. Together with Discourses, Historical, and Observations Physical concerning them. And in a Second Part are annexed Meditations, and Observations Theological and Moral, in Three Centuries upon that Subject."

According to the title page, the first part was printed in London by "R. I. for Thomas Parkhurst, to be sold at his shop, at the Three Crowns in Cheapside, over against the Great Conduit, 1657." The title page of the second part bears the statement "Printed by M. S. for Thomas Parkhurst and are to be sould at

his Shop, at the signe of the three Crownes over against the Great Conduit at the lower end of Cheap-side. 1657.”

Apparently “R. I.” and “M. S.” did not agree beforehand as to the spelling of certain words. On the title page of the first part, Samuel is spelled with one “l” and in the second part with two. The word “Crowns” appears on the first title page, and “Crownes” on the second; “Moral” on the first and “Morall” on the second; “Pastor” on the first and “Pastour” on the second, and other differences meet one’s eye in the texts of both parts.

The book is dedicated “To the Right Honorable, Truly Noble, and Religious Lord, Robert Earle of Warwick, Baron of Leez, &c.,” and six pages of solemn devotion follow.

The table of contents, which is herewith presented, gives one a very good idea of the scope of the book.

- Chap. 1, Of the Excellency of Bees
- Chap. 2, Of the Name
- Chap. 3, The Definition and Description
- Chap. 4, Of the Kindes and Colours
- Chap. 5, Bees nature and properties
- Chap. 6, Bees Politicks, Ethicks, &c.
- Chap. 7, Of the Bees senses
- Chap. 8, Of the Queen-bee
- Chap. 9, Of the Drone
- Chap. 10, Of the Generation of Bees
- Chap. 11, Of the Hives, and ordering them
- Chap. 12, Of Seats for the Hives, and Bee-Garden
- Chap. 13, Of the Bees-work
- Chap. 14, Of swarming, and hiving of Bees
- Chap. 15, What Flowers the Bees gather of
- Chap. 16, Of the ordering of Bees
- Chap. 17, Of Bees breathing
- Chap. 18, Of Bees temperature, sleep, and age
- Chap. 19, Of Bees Fighting and Robbing
- Chap. 20, Of Bees Enemies and Sickneses
- Chap. 21, Of the Honey-dew
- Chap. 22, Of Hony
- Chap. 23, Of Tree-hony

- Chap. 24, Of Waxe
- Chap. 25, Observations and discourses, Historical and Fabulous
- Chap. 26, Observations, Physical, &c.
- Chap. 27, Of divers kindes of Wild-Bees
- Chap. 28, Of the Wasp
- Chap. 29, Of the Hornet
- Chap. 30, Of Humble-Bees
- Chap. 31, Of Grashoppers
- Chap. 32, Of American Bees

After the table of contents are six pages headed "A Catalogue of such Authors as are cited, and made use of in this Tractate" containing some 366 names. More definite references to the writings of these authors are given on the margins of the pages devoted to the text. Following the table of authorities are 16 pages given up to eight "elegies," each a flattering epopoeia, praising Purchas for his learning, extensive reading, experience and sermon on the text of the bee. Both the book and the author are included in these golden opinions, written presumably by friends and colleagues.

Succeeding the poems are the thirty-two chapters, totaling over 200 pages, mainly on the honey bee. These chapters constitute a quaint treatise on bees and beekeeping. Frequent references are made to the writings of Virgil, Aldrovandus, Galen, Pliny, Cardanus, Aristotle, Scaliger and others, the two latter authors being quoted extensively. In spite of the numerous citations it appears that Purchas kept bees and was intensely interested in the subject. In the chapters dealing with practical beekeeping, he injects the results of his experiences. In Chapter Eleven he says "I have many Hives containing five pecks which swarm yearly, and last longer than those that are hived in small Hives," and recommends straw hives as the best. Other records of his familiarity with bees are found in Chapters XI, XII, XIV, XV and later ones relative to apiculture. The last six chapters treat of wild bees, hornets, grasshoppers, etc.

Subsequent to the last chapter, the publisher, Thomas Parkhurst, devotes three pages to notices of other books, mainly reli-

gious ones. One is entitled "Groans of the Spirit, or the Trial of the Truth of Prayer. A Handkercher for Parents Wet-eyes, upon the death of their children or friends"; another, "A Treatise against the Toleration of all Religions. By Mr. Thomas Edwards." A page of errata for both first and second parts of the book precedes the title page of the second part.

The second part is divided into what Purchas calls three centuries, each century consisting of 100 meditations of varying lengths. The quotations are fewer in the second part, and it is probable that this is the more original of the two. Parallels are shown between the actions of men and bees and religious and other conclusions drawn.

A few of the shorter meditations are quoted as follows. These are similar to the longer ones, but less periphrastic.

"Bees will endure Waspes abroad, or in other hives, but never willingly in their owne, for antipathie is a perpetuall enmitie. If the force of antipathie prevaile so farre to make an irreconcilable hatred, as great should be our hatred against sinners and Gods dishonour. It is fearefull when we can easily comport with the wicked and digest their company and societie."

"Many hate not sin, neither flie it because it is sinne, but as children doe Bees, not because they are Bees, but because they have a sting; so doe they sinne, because it is hurtfull."

"All is one to God to make an Angel or a Bee, to create the brightest Cherub, or the most contemptible flie; for in every creation, no lesse then an omnipotency must be the efficient, and no more then nothing is ever the object."

"The Bee gives honey, but sometimes she stings: prosperitie hath it's sweetnesse, and also it's sting. Sunshine is pleasant, but sometime it scorseth."

"Some use flowers only for the beauty or the smell, the Physicians for health but the Bees for honey. So doe wise and prudent persons apply their studies for the enriching and feeding of their mindes."

"As a Spiders web is not therefore better because it is woven out of her bowels; so neither is the labour of the learned more contemptible, because as Bees, they gather much from others."

This last meditation makes it appear as if Purchas were justifying his actions in gathering much from others.

In 1834 Samuel Bagster republished most of the meditations under the title "Spiritual Honey from Natural Hives or Meditations and Observations on the Natural History and Habits of Bees, first introduced to public notice in 1657 by Samuel Purchas, A. M." In the preface, Bagster states that during his reading about bees, he bought a copy of Purchas's book and was so impressed by the "simplicity of their similes and their quaint style," that he printed them as Purchas wrote them, adding a text of scripture to each as a motto and rejecting only those that alluded to politics. It was Bagster's opinion that, as the selection of the meditations involved a long course of reading, they had been collected by Purchas's father, who, being in somewhat straightened circumstances, at his death left them to his son, and the son followed his father's footsteps by devoting himself to literature and parochial duties. However, there appears to be no conclusive evidence in support of such an opinion.

Samuel Purchas, author of "A Theatre of Politicall Flying Insects," was the son of Samuel Purchas, the "British Ptolemy" author of "Purchas his Pilgrimage, or Relations of the World, and the Religions observed in all Ages and Places discovered from the Creation to this present time." The father was born, according to some accounts, about 1577 at Thaxted in Essex, and was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he took his Master's degree in 1600 and afterward that of Bachelor of Divinity. In 1614 he was collated to the rectory of St. Martin's, Ludgate, London, and in 1615 was incorporated at Oxford, bachelor of divinity as he stood at Cambridge. The first volume of his great work, the "Pilgrimage," appeared in 1613 and the last in 1625, a large part of his material being the unpublished papers of his predecessor, Hackylut. He published other books also, and it is recorded that his pecuniary circumstances were greatly embarrassed thereby, although part of his money difficulty was due to his assistance to relations. In 1618 his brother-in-law, William Predimore, died and left a widow and family in Purchas's care, and in the same year his brother Daniel Purchas died and left four destitute orphans which had to be looked after. About the same time he lost his mother.

On December 2, 1601, he obtained from the Bishop of London's office a license to marry Jane Lease, age 26, daughter of Vincent

Lease, and his own age at that time was given as 27. He died in 1626 at the age of 51, and his will, written May 31, 1625, was proved October 21, 1626. According to the above dates he must have been born close to 1575. Some accounts give 1577 at the year of his birth and 1628 as the year of his death. According to his will, his son Samuel inherited a dwelling house and lands in the parish of Thaxted. His wife, Jane, however, was to have the use of the lands so long as she remained a widow. Samuel also received his father's seal ring, and his library, globes, maps, charts and books except those which his father had written, as he (the son) already had copies of such.

According to "Alumni Cantabrigienses" the son was formally admitted into Cambridge University as a pensioner, the second of the three ranks in which students were matriculated, from St. John's College during the Michaelmas term 1622. He received the degree of bachelor of arts in 1625-1626, and that of master of arts in 1629. It is stated that he was perhaps ordained deacon (London) December 24, 1626, at the age of 24, which would make the year of his birth about 1602. He was Rector of Sutton, Essex, from 1629 until the year of his death, about 1658. His will was proved January 28, 1658-9.

Apparently his only printed work was his treatise on bees, the material for which might or might not have been inherited in part from his father. Ample time had elapsed between his father's death and the publication of the book, some thirty years, for the collection and compilation of material and also for the mature theological reflections which the book contains. Even though he interspersed his accounts with religious intellections, as did his father in his narratives, this is not proof that he did not write the accounts.

It is of interest to note in closing that during the lifetime of the author England's rulers were successively James VI of Scotland I of England, son of Mary Queen of Scots; his son Charles I, who was beheaded in 1649 at the end of the civil war between the king's party and that of the parliament, and Cromwell, whose protectorate ended in 1658.

On account of the fact that both father and son had identical names, the father is sometimes credited with the son's writings, as for instance in *Bibliotheca Entomologica* by Hagen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful for the library facilities extended by the American Museum of Natural History, the New Jersey State Library and Princeton University. To Mr. George Osborn, Librarian of Rutgers College, I am especially indebted for many helpful suggestions and material assistance.

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